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Santa gets his big day

FRANKI IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Santa! at the Pelham Santa Claus Parade on Saturday. See story and photos on page 2.

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UPFRONT

■ **HOLIDAYS:** Hundreds line streets for sight of floats and old Saint Nick

Un-frosty Fenwick welcomes Santa

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

It sure didn't feel like Christmas when Santa Claus came to town Saturday.

Pelham held its annual Santa Claus Parade under overcast skies with temperatures in the 10°C range.

The unusually warm weather didn't diminish the holiday spirit, though, as hundreds gathered along the streets of Fenwick to take in the festivities.

Highlights included the Grinch riding in a jail cell, a steel drum band, a horse-drawn carriage and, of course, old St. Nicholas, who rode in on a sleigh pulled by Buddy the Elf on an ATV.

"It's great to see so many folks come out to the parade and welcome Santa to the community," said Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn, who dressed in old-fashioned clothes and waved to residents from a carriage.

The parade began at Bethany Christian Reformed Church on Balfour Street and ended at Centennial Park on Church Street.

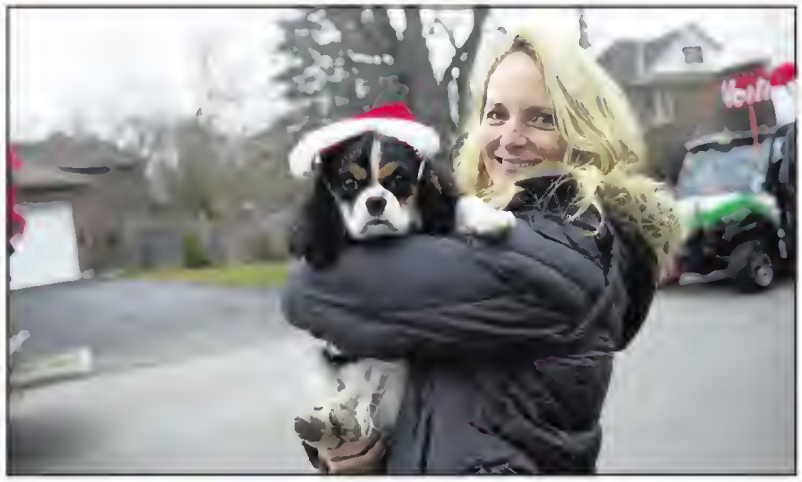
At the park, Santa greeted children, who were treated to hot apple cider and activities.

franki.ikeman@sunmedia.ca
Twitter: @Frankilkeman

The E.L. Crossley Secondary School marching band plays at the Pelham Santa Claus Parade.

PHOTOS BY FRANKI IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

The Grinch takes in the parade from "Whoville Jail" at the Pelham Santa Claus Parade.



Erika Christian and her dog Sophie take in the Pelham Santa Claus Parade.

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Feast among friends

HANDOUT PHOTOS/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Above: It was another packed house at Fonthill District KinsmenâĂôs 54th annual seniors Christmas party. More than a hundred people turned out for the affair.
Right: Nine-year-old Kiara van Steekelenburg performs at Fonthill District KinsmenâĂôs 54th annual seniors Christmas party.

TREATY RIGHTS: Aboriginal hunt met by protesters from both sides

Short Hills deer harvest nearly doubled in 2015

KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network

Nearly twice as many deer were killed during a hunt at Short Hills Provincial Park this year over last.

Six days of hunting in November by members of the Haudenosaunee aboriginal community led to 39 deer harvested, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry spokeswoman Jolanta Kowalski said.

That's up from 21 deer harvested over six days in November and December 2014.

But the ministry said aerial surveys found the park has about 10 times more deer than its ecological carrying capacity.

A February 2015 aerial survey found 442 deer in Short Hills, nearly the same number as in 2014. That's compared to 244 in 2013.

Whether another hunt will take place in the new year hasn't been decided yet.

"The ministry intends to meet with the Haudenosaunee Wildlife and Habitat Authority in the spring to hear from them whether they intend to conduct another aboriginal traditional harvest in 2016," Kowalski said in an e-mail.

This November's hunt, over three two-day blocks, was the fourth to take place at Short Hills since January 2013 when the Haudenosaunee exercised their 1701 treaty rights to hunt on traditional grounds.

At that time, seven deer were harvested over four days.

The aboriginal-only archery hunt has drawn protesters from the start, citing safety concerns or animal rights. Protesters gathered in the mornings and evenings when hunters arrived and left, and were joined this year by supporters of the hunt.

The 1,700-acre park was closed to the public during the harvest, with Ontario Parks officials monitoring the perimeter.

Despite the higher number of deer harvested this year, the ministry said the Haudenosaunee community had the same number of participants as last year.

Those numbers ranged from 65 participants on Nov. 14, the hunt's first day, to 32 participants on Nov. 29, the final day.

Total participation over the six days, with individual hunters being counted more than once, was 254 this year and 253 last year.

Kowalski said those numbers also include non-hunters that entered the park, such as people involved in aboriginal ceremonies during the harvest.

Costs to the ministry for the hunt are not yet available. The 2014 six-day hunt cost almost $62,000 for Ontario Parks staff salaries, accommodations and meals.

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FILE PHOTO

A group of people were out at the Pelham Rd entrance to Short Hills Conservation Area protesting the deer hunt. At least one vehicle brought a deer on the final day of the controversial hunt.

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COMMENT

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Great Christmas spirit — even without snow

DAVE AUGUSTYN
For Postmedia Network

What a joy to join the Pelham senior citizens group last Wednesday at Old Pelham Town Hall for a special holiday lunch and carols — including Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*.

Despite the lack of snow, it does feel like Christmas in Pelham.

The holiday spirit began early in Pelham on Nov. 5 when several businesses hosted holiday open houses. Some store owners even closed their shops for a couple of days and stunningly transformed them into Christmas wonders.

Over the following weeks, the town began decorating much of Pelham — from Peace Park and the bandshell in Fonthill, to town hall, to hydro poles in Pelham's urbanized areas, to the flagpole and trees in Fenwick.

And, some very dedicated, community-minded elves took it upon themselves to "spruce-up" our town. While the rest of us were sleeping or working, these elves decorated almost every utility pole and light standard in sight using evergreen boughs and red bows. So many of us appreciate their efforts.

Then, the Fenwick Firefighters Association took the lead for its turkey raffle tradition, followed closely by the Fonthill Lions (with a chili cookoff to boot).

Thanks to Christmas in Pelham volunteers and town staff for organizing the third Christmas Under the Arches/Outdoor Christmas Market in Fonthill on Dec. 4. The hundreds participating and the vendors, services clubs and musicians helped make the event wonderful and vibrant.

Then, hundreds and hundreds of people shared the true spirit of generosity on Dec. 5 for the 25th annual Pelham Community Food Drive for Pelham Cares. Thank you to each of the donors and all the volunteers who went door-to-door to support those less fortunate in our town. Thanks, as well, for those volunteers unpacking, sorting and repacking non-perishable food. Finally, thanks to the businesses who donated food and funds so that volunteers were fed and the event was publicized.

This past weekend, the Fabulous Fenwick Lions and others in the community organized the annual Santa Claus parade. Despite the abundance of candy for kids, all knew it was not another Halloween when "Buddy the Elf" drove Santa through the recently revitalized Downtown Fenwick and to Centennial Park.

Add to all this the Christmas concerts at our schools, the open houses at businesses and private homes, the work parties, and all the celebrations at Pelham's churches, and we are doing well to prepare for Christmas.

I hope that you and your family experience the joy of the spirit of Christmas this holiday season. I also wish you all the best in 2016.

You may contact Mayor Dave at mayordave@pelham.ca or read past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com.

HANDOUT/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Mont Blanc is shown in this undated photo by Daniel Berube, courtesy of Rene Beauchamp.

Shipwrecks — Mont Blanc

SKIP GILLHAM
For Postmedia Network

A collision on the St. Lawrence River 50 years ago this past September was a mismatch.

The Canadian tanker *Eastern Shell* and the wooden hulled pulpwood carrier *Mont Blanc* came together in fog east of Trois Rivieres, Que., on Sept. 3, 1965, and the wooden ship was doomed.

All of the crew got off safely and were picked up by the lifeboat of the tanker but they watched their vessel sink leaving a large collection of pulpwood logs floating on the river.

Mont Blanc had been built in 1944 using the lower hull of an earlier ship. The latter had a reputation as a coal carrier and apparently a rum runner. It was taken over by the RCMP in 1929 and laid up at Lauzon until being rebuilt during the Second World War.

Mont Blanc had been a Great Lakes caller during the 1950s bringing cargoes of sweet smelling pulpwood from Quebec to Great Lakes paper mill docks. But once the St. Lawrence Seaway opened in 1959, the ship spent its remaining days on the St. Lawrence until the accident of a half-century ago.

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LOCALNEWS

■ **BOOKS:** Mystery writer Sandra Orchard

Accident led to career as author

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

It wasn't a chance encounter or sudden job loss which launched Sandra Orchard's career as a writer.

It was excruciating pain.

While working on the century-old farmhouse in Pelham she shares with husband, Michael, she slipped a disc in her back. It had to be surgically removed, resulting in nerve damage and life-changing discomfort.

"I can't sit at a desk for more than a couple hours, and I can't stand in one spot for more than 20 minutes," she says. "But I can sit in a Gravity Chair with my laptop all day."

Though she majored in math at university, Orchard — real name: Sandra van den Bogerd ("Try Googling that," she says) — was writing reviews and articles for her home-schooling newsletter. Barely able to move after the mishap, she turned her attention to fiction. After her mother's death, she decided the best way to process her feelings was to instil them in her own characters.

It led to *Deep Cover*, her 2011 debut novel about an undercover cop, the woman he loved while maintaining his cover, and her criminal uncle he wants to take down.

It was followed by two more books in her Undercover Cops series, a series for Harlequin's Love Inspired Suspense line, and most recently, her acclaimed Port Aster Secrets series.

Set in Niagara, the three Port Aster books trace the mystery surrounding the death of a research scientist's friend as they near a breakthrough for treating depression with herbal medicine. It involves the border and a miracle plant for a story that concluded in *Desperate Measures*, released in July.

"I was ready to kill them all by the end.

"When I started researching pharmaceutical practices, there's lots of fodder there," she says.

The second book in the series, *Blind Trust*, earned her a Word Award from the Word Guild this year, while one of her Harlequin books — *Identity Withheld* — won a National Readers' Choice award.

She has a new mystery trilogy on deck, steering her away from Harlequin for the time being.

"The last few I pitched to Harlequin, they said, 'This is too much mystery,' because that's where my brain is still," she says. "They want more jeopardy. They want the heroine in jeopardy all the time. You know, I've blown up cars, I've had carbon monoxide in houses, I've had everything you can think of. It starts to duplicate, because I've already written seven books for them."

Because mystery is her strong suit, Orchard is also realistic: Her trilogies won't be the next *Hunger Games* or *Twilight*, and she's fine with that.

"Most of the mystery writers that make a decent living, you don't really know their names," she says. ("But) they've done very well in Niagara. I've had some very supportive book stores, and my publisher was happy enough with the sales that they gave me a contract for another three books."

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SUBMITTED PHOTO
Niagara mystery writer Sandra Orchard sign books at R&B Novel Teas in downtown Niagara Falls Saturday.

■ ECONOMY

Data shows Niagara economy is powering up

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

A new study suggests Hamilton-Niagara is growing some economic muscle.

The recently released Ontario Economic Update 2016 says employment in the "Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula Economic Region" expanded at a faster pace in 2015 than in previous years.

The St. Catharines-Niagara census metro area led with a near five per cent rise in employment — while employment growth in the Brantford census area is at a 1.5 per cent pace this year and Hamilton has growth of around one per cent per year.

It also says service-producing industries, including tourism and health have been sources of employment growth regionally. Closures in the manufacturing sector have been subsiding.

The report was created by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Credit Unions of Ontario, with support from Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce.

It said St. Catharines-Niagara overall unemployment is forecast to fall below seven per cent this year, the lowest since 2008. That regional CMA does not include Grimsby or West Lincoln.

Statistics Canada most recently had St. Catharines-Niagara's November unemployment rate at 7.8 per cent, seasonally adjusted — that's in the bottom half of large census metro areas in Ontario. However, this was during a period of seasonal high unemployment for the region. October's was 7.3 per cent.

Meanwhile, job growth is forecast at 1.7 percent during 2016 in the Hamilton-Niagara region, slightly lower than the 2.2 per cent expected in 2015, but higher than every other year since recession.

"Looking ahead, manufacturing, tourism and transportation services stand to benefit from more favourable external conditions," said the update summary released by the Niagara chamber. It said domestic sectors such as construction, real estate and retail trade will gain from low interest rates and an improvement in economic conditions.

A major manufacturing decline — which has hammered Niagara and southwest Ontario — appears to have reversed.

"Most of the major restructuring in the manufacturing sector appears to be over," said Liam McGuinty, director of policy at the Ontario chamber. "That's not unique to (Niagara), it's something we're seeing across southwestern Ontario and the GTA."

According to provincewide data, most areas will enjoy improving economic conditions in the coming year.

Growth will be driven in part by a rise in exports, a stronger U.S. economy and a low Canadian dollar. Government fiscal policy will also be a key driver, with federal and provincial infrastructure commitments to stimulate growth.

Across Ontario, regional growth performances will be led by the Toronto and Hamilton-Niagara regions, with the Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie and London regions close behind.

McGuinty said a lot of the optimistic forecast has to do with "Ontario's rising fortunes, generally."

In the greater Niagara-Hamilton-GTA, McGuinty said there's been an "uptick in not just service sector, but also manufacturing and it's on the back of a weakening Canadian dollar and growing American consumer demand."

Corrina Carson, interim executive director of the Niagara Workforce Planning Board, said her group supports the accuracy of the study findings.

"It's encouraging in its forecasts of an improving outlook on the future growth of the Hamilton-Niagara CMA using (key) indicators," Carson said, adding the study focuses on projected forecasts for our larger economic region.

The board's own labour market report, released last month, shows St. Catharines-Niagara has seen growth across all industries by employment, with the exception of information, culture and recreation.

"While manufacturing experienced significant loss between 2009-2014, it has held steady between 2009-2014 (and) better than that of Ontario," Carson said.

Niagara chamber CEO Mishka Balsom said one big factor behind the declining unemployment rates noted in the update is a lower rate of participation in the labour force, especially since the recession.

"Had the labour force participation roughly remained the same as in 2009 and employment growth was unchanged, the region's unemployment rate would be closer to nine per cent, rather than six," Balsom said.

As for manufacturing Balsom says despite the overall decline of that sector, "local manufacturing job numbers have been stable for years now."

"In fact, we've actually increased employment in manufacturing over the last five years, even while Ontario as a whole lost manufacturing jobs," she said

Economic update report

■ It spans census metropolitan areas of Hamilton, St. Catharines-Niagara, and Brantford, and also covers Haldimand-Norfolk.

■ Region grew more rapidly in 2015 than 2014. Unlike last year, most of this year's employment growth was outside the Hamilton census metro area. The St. Catharines-Niagara CMA led with a near five per cent rise, followed by a substantial employment gain outside the three CMAs in the region.

■ Full-time employment in the region is well above trend growth for the second year in a row. Most of the gains are centred in the Hamilton and St. Catharines-Niagara. Part-time employment down and full-time is up, and total hours worked is higher.

■ Unemployment at six per cent is the lowest in years. Hamilton's rate will approach an average of 5.6 per cent in 2015 and in St. Catharines-Niagara it will fall below seven per cent, the lowest since 2008.

■ The employment share of service industries in the regions is 77 per cent, compared to 63 per cent in 1987 and 70 per cent in 1996. The highest share is in St. Catharines-Niagara, due to its major tourist industry.

Source: Update synopsis from Ontario Chamber of Commerce

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Brian Cosby of the OPP Auxiliary presents Lori Grande of Pelham Cares $960 in Sobeys gift cards. This was in addition to about 605 kilograms of food, the result of their auxiliary's annual food drive at the Fonthill Sobeys store.

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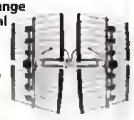

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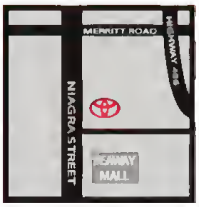

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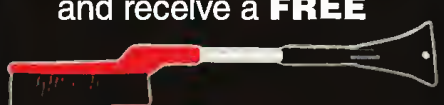

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■ CONCERT

Metric, Death Cab for Cutie headed to Meridian Centre

Metric and Death Cab for Cutie will perform at Meridian Centre in St. Catharines March 22.

Tickets can be purchased at livenation.com or by phone at 1-855-985-5000. Prices, including HST, are $29.50, $39.50 and $55 plus service charges.

The concert is part of the Lights on the Horizon tour that includes 11 Canadian cities.

Death Cab for Cutie is touring in support of their eighth studio album, *Kintsugi*, which has been nominated for a 2016 Grammy Award in the best rock album category.

Metric's recent releases have earned multiple Juno Awards, including two for album of the year and one for artist of the year.

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Ben Gibbard performs during a Death Cab for Cutie show in Calgary this file photo.

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■ GOVERNMENT

New Niagara MPs get down to work

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

For the first time in a decade, Niagara is without representation at the federal cabinet table.

But the region's newest Liberal MPs, Chris Bittle of St. Catharines and Vance Badawey of Niagara Centre, say Niagara won't suffer as a result.

"What it means is that I can focus entirely on local priorities," Bittle said late last week. "When you sit as a minister, you have another set of priorities that can take you out of the constituency."

He and Badawey were among the final MPs to be sworn in before Parliament resumed. Although elected, MPs do not have access to government resources until they take their oaths of office.

"You don't get sworn in until you get your writ from Elections Canada, and that takes some time," said Bittle.

Not that it stopped them from getting down to business while waiting for their turn to be sworn in. Both men met with local politicians and business leaders prior to travelling to Ottawa to get their offices set up, and were already fielding calls from constituents.

"I was getting phone calls and e-mails almost immediately (after the election)," said Badawey, the former Port Colborne mayor. "Constituents were asking for help with one issue or another, so I got to work right away. There were some things that I couldn't do immediately, but I wasn't going to wait."

Under the previous Conservative government, Niagara was home to one cabinet minister: Tory veteran Rob Nicholson of Niagara Falls held several cabinet posts, finishing his tour as a government MP as foreign affairs minister. He now sits as the justice critic for the opposition Conservatives.

Former St. Catharines Tory MP Rick Dykstra did not hold a ministerial post, but did serve as a secretary in a few ministries, including immigration.

Neither Badawey nor Bittle were assigned to secretary posts.

Badawey said that doesn't mean the new MPs won't have their hands full on the Hill.

"The real work of governing gets done at the committee level, and I am looking forward to taking part in that process," he said. "When you are working at this level, you have more tools to work with than you do at the municipal level, and I am looking forward to bringing those to bear on issues important to Niagara."

IN BRIEF

Catholic board names its leaders

Father Paul MacNeil

was re-elected chair of Niagara Catholic District School Board and Kathy Burtnik was elected vice-chair at a recent annual organizational meeting.

MacNeil was first elected to the board in 2010 and represents voters in Grimsby, Pelham, Lincoln and West Lincoln. It is his second term on the board and his second time as chairman.

Burtnik, representing St. Catharines, has previously served as chair and vice-chair and is currently president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association.

Fire in Pelham

Pelham Fire Services, paramedics and police responded to a structure fire on Chantler Road off Cream Street in Pelham shortly after 5 p.m. Saturday.

A fire dispatcher said the call came in at 5:03 p.m. with reports of visible flames.

Five trucks were on the scene battling the blaze. Niagara EMS said it was called to the scene to be on standby, but didn't transport any patients.

There was no damage estimate available.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED CHANGE TO A RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

Project Name: Niagara Region Wind Farm

Renewable Energy Approval: 4353-9HMP2R

IESO Reference Number: F-001580-WIN-130-601

Project Location: The Niagara Region Wind Farm (the "Project") is located within Haldimand County and Niagara Region (including the Townships of Wainfleet and West Lincoln and the Town of Lincoln). The electrical interconnection components are located within the Town of Lincoln and the Township of West Lincoln, in Niagara Region, and in Haldimand County in southern Ontario.

Dated At: Haldimand County and Niagara Region on this 9th day of December, 2015.

Niagara Region Wind Corporation ("NRWC") was issued a Renewable Energy Approval (REA) on November 6, 2014 in respect of the Niagara Region Wind Farm project (the "project"). Information with respect to the decision on this project can be viewed on the Environmental Registry by searching EBR #012-0614. An amendment to the existing approval for an administrative change to the Project was issued by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) on November 23, 2015; to acknowledge the change in ownership of the Project from 'Niagara Region Wind Corporation' to 'FWRN LP', as FWRN LP has purchased the Project.

FWRN LP is proposing to make changes to the project and the project itself is subject to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act of Ontario (Act) Part V.0.1 and Ontario Regulation 359/09 (Regulation). In accordance with Section 16.0.1 of the Regulation this notice is being distributed to make the public aware of proposed changes to the project.

Project Description and Proposed Change

Pursuant to the Act and Regulation, the facility, in respect of which the REA was issued, is considered to be a Class 4 Wind Facility. An application has been made to the MOECC to change the project and alter the terms and conditions of the existing REA. The proposed changes consist of both technical and project design changes to the REA Application and include:

1. Expansion of the footprint for the Interconnect Station on Mountainview Road to accommodate additional equipment in response to Hydro One Networks Inc. (HONI) connection requirements;

2. Additional permanent alternative access roads from T11 to T12 and from T11 to T41;

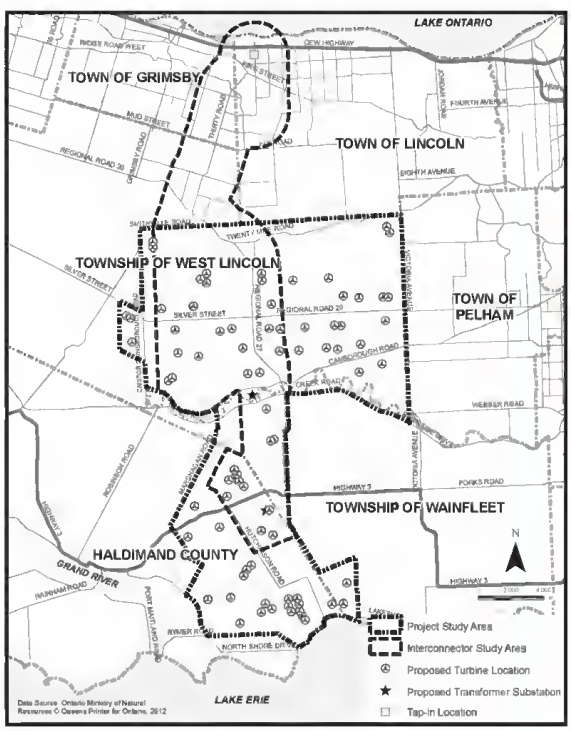
3. Adjustment of the footprint for the North Substation (north of the Welland River) to accommodate reorientation of the substation;

4. Incorporation of additional operational flexibility to install junction boxes within either the municipal right-of-way, as proposed and approved in the REA, or on participating properties within previously assessed areas along the proposed collector line routes;

5. Modification of 11 of the Project's 80 potential turbines to a customized ENERCON E101 (2.9MW) turbine on 124 meter towers;

6. Derating of the transformer selected for the north substation to 90 MVA as a base rating, and 69 MVA for the south substation; and

7. Adjustment to access road entrances, on private land owned by participating landowners.



Documents for Public Inspection

FWRN LP has developed a Modification Document which summarizes the proposed changes. A written copy of the Modification Document is currently available for public inspection on the project website (http://www.nrwf.ca/projectdocuments/). Copies of the final REA documents also remain available on the project website.

Project Contacts and Information:

To learn more about the project, or to communicate questions or comments, please contact:

Project Email Address: info@nrwf.ca

Project Website: www.nrwf.ca

Project Phone Number: 819-363-6491 or 1-844-363-6491 (toll free)

Shiloh Berriman, Project Coordinator
FRWN LP
4672 Bartlet Road South
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B1

J.A. (Al) Leggett, BA, MCIP, RPP, Project Manager
Stantec Consulting Ltd.
300 - 675 Cochrane Drive West Tower
Markham, ON L3R 0B8

Information will be collected and used in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act and Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This information will be used to assist NRWC in meeting applicable environmental approvals requirements. This material will be maintained on file for use during the project and may be included in project documentation. Unless indicated otherwise, personal information and all comments will become part of the public record and publicly released as part of project documentation.

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■ BIZ BUZZ

It's all about family pho in Fonthill

FRANKI IKEMAN
Postmedia Network

Offering up quick and delicious Vietnamese food is just the family business.

After eight successful years operating in St. Catharines and a few years in Niagara Falls, Pho Dau Bo opened its newest restaurant in Fonthill last Tuesday to a steady stream of new and familiar faces.

The man behind the business, Tam Do, said it was a stroke of luck and a bit of fate that brought him to the Pelham community.

"Eleven years ago, I had a nail shop across the street there, a nail salon ... I like the community, I liked the customers, but to sit still and do pedicures and manicures, I'm not that type of person," Do said.

"So I moved on to do restaurants."

The location, the former Donut Diner on Highway 20 between McDonald's and Sobeys, had sat vacant for some time so he decided to look into purchasing the building.

Do said he was excited to be able to buy the building in June and be back in a community he truly loves.

Do and his wife, Rose, were both busy at the new restaurant in Fonthill for the opening, but eventually the reins will be handed to daughter Lyn Vo and her husband, Johnny Tran.

Vo said she's looking forward to introducing new and old customers to Vietnamese cuisine.

"I think the restaurant business is just something my dad has always wanted to do, so it just kind of rubbed off on me," she said.

She said the idea to come back to Fonthill was borne out of her father's fondness for the community, but she thinks the business will thrive in a market that isn't very saturated with ethnic food.

On top of that, she said, many of their customers from the St. Catharines store had been coming from Niagara's southern communities.

"A lot of our customers already live in the Welland area," Vo said. "A lot of the people who came in today were already regulars."

The restaurant offers a variety of Vietnamese cuisine to sit and enjoy or take out. Vo said the service is very quick and takeout customers can have their orders ready to head back to the office in minutes.

FRANKI IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Tam Do, top left, Johnny Tran, Rose Do, bottom left, and Lyn Vo opened the new Pho Dau Bo restaurant in Fonthill.

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Holiday gift ideas with taste

TIFFANY MAYER
Special to Postmedia Network

The weather outside is far from frightful. In fact, it's far from festive.

While I'd like to give that El Niño a big high five for these mild temperatures, it has made me forget the holidays are coming. I can't imagine I'm the only one thinking the big day — whatever it is for each of us this season — is a long way off.

So to keep us all on track and remind us the days are melting faster than a snowflake in this eternal fall weather, I give you the 2015 edition of the Eating Niagara gift list for gourmands, foodies, bon vivants and culinarians (and, with it, my wish for a new word to describe us all that doesn't sound as silly as those above).

For the hands-on hedonist

Two Niagara gastronomes published cookbooks worthy of placement next to that spattered Joy of Cooking on our cookbook shelves.

Go on a global food tour from the comfort of your stove with *Curbside: Modern Street Food from a Vagabond Chef,* by Adam Hynam-Smith, chef-proprietor of Niagara's internationally-inspired El Gastronomo Vagabundo food truck. $32.95 at major bookstores.

St. Catharines-based food writer Tara O'Brady provides a feast for the eyes and several for the table with *Seven Spoons: My Favorite Recipes for Any and Every Day,* named after her enduring food blog. $29.95 at major bookstores.

For the community-minded connoisseur

Food brings people together to share in a common goal. Usually, that's filling rumbling bellies. Gifting a membership to the Niagara Local Food Co-op or the Garden City Food Co-op taps into food's power of quieting the rumble while building community.

The Niagara Local Food Co-op is an online market supporting local farmers and entrepreneurs by featuring Niagara produce, prepared foods and other staples. Memberships are $50 at niagaralocalfood-coop.ca.

The Garden City Food Co-op is a downtown St. Catharines' grocery store-in-waiting. The more memberships sold, the sooner it will open, converting a food desert into fertile food turf. Sign up a loved one for $120 at gardencityfoodcoop.ca.

For the experiential epicurean

Become a high flyer by chartering a helicopter to whisk hard-to-buy-for foodies over the vineyards of Niagara-on-the-Lake and land among the vines, so they can enjoy a wine tasting. Niagara Helicopters can make it happen. $994.40 for up to seven people (niagarahelicopters.com).

For those who prefer to keep their feet firmly planted on the ground, a gift certificate for a guided walking tour that hits all the sweet and savoury spots in the Old Town, Niagara Falls or St. Catharines is a good bet. $55, Niagara Culinary Tours (niagaraculinarytours.com).

For the discerning dilettante

Sip coffee and eat dinner from vessels with character. Shed Pottery's Johann Munro will have you finally bidding adieu to your mother's melamine for hand-built and wheel-thrown dinner plates, bowls and coffee mugs. Prices vary. 1139 Pelham Rd., St. Catharines (shedpotterybyjohann.com).

Charcuterie and carpentry fans will feel grateful unwrapping a Naked Grain cutting board, made of cherry, walnut and maple by St. Catharines carpenter Kim Gillard. No two handcrafted boards, suitable for cutting or serving, are the same. Available online for $65 and $95 at provisionsfoodcompany.com.

The rest of the herd might warm up by wrapping up in a mass-produced blanket, but the Linc Farm at Southbrook Vineyards has something unique to throw your way: blankets of wool from the sheep who call the winery home. The plain or plaid throws are made by MacAusland's Woollen Mills in P.E.I. Prices vary. 581 Niagara Stone Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The rest of the herd might warm up by wrapping up in a mass-produced blanket, but the Linc Farm at Southbrook Vineyards has something unique to throw your way: blankets of wool from the sheep who call the winery home. The plain or plaid throws are made by MacAusland's Woollen Mills in P.E.I. Sheep and lambskins are also available. Prices vary. 581 Niagara Stone Rd., Niagara-on-the-Lake.

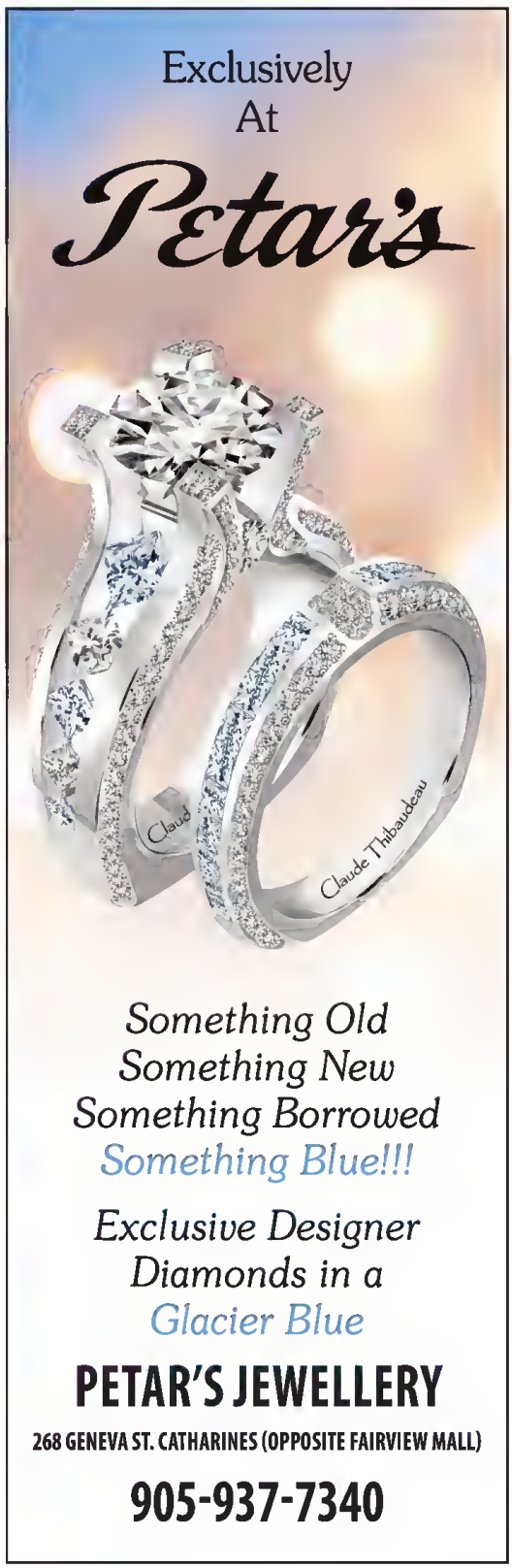
A visit with chefs of kitchens future

Dinner out is always an option. But a dinner made by Junior Culinary Team Canada and Junior Culinary Team USA is more than that. It's an event. These young chefs will serve six courses matched with beer, wine and live music at Niagara College's Canadian Food and Wine Institute on Jan. 9. The tickets will fit easily into a stocking, though those attending might not fit into much more than elastic-waist pants afterward. $99 per person (canadianfoodandwineinstitute.ca/events).

The sweetest gift of all

That would be chocolate. And Rebecca Nigh at Nigh's Sweet Shop in Stevensville will have everything needed to keep any sweet tooth happy these holidays: handmade bonbons, chocolate bars, and novelties in just about any shape, size and flavour. It's a gift just setting foot in this store. Prices vary. 3757 Netherby Rd., Stevensville.

Tiffany Mayer is the author of Niagara Food: A Flavourful History of the Peninsula's Bounty (The History Press). She also blogs about food and farming at eatingniagara.com. You can reach her at eatingniagara@gmail.com or on Twitter @eatingniagara.



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CURLING: National championship expected to put region in the TV spotlight

Scotties rolling into Niagara

BERNIE PUCHALSKI
Postmedia Network

A standing ovation at St. Catharines Golf and Country Club greeted the news that Meridian Centre will host the 2017 Scotties Tournament of Hearts national women's curling championships.

"We've done a couple of announcements this year, and that has got to be the first standing ovation," said Curling Canada spokesman Al Cameron.

Curling Canada vice-chairman Peter Inch said partnerships were what helped St. Catharines secure the event that will bring Canada's best female curlers to the city.

"There's a great volunteer community here, there's a great club that is going to be involved, there's the Meridian Centre and the Ontario Curling Association " Inch said.

"When you put that all together, St. Catharines was the place."

Curling Canada received upwards of eight bids to host the event and cut the number to a shortlist of two or three before picking St. Catharines.

"You need the city support, but you also need the city sponsorship," Inch said.

"It's a big part of it. We will bring the national and international sponsors that are part of our Season of Champions, but we need local sponsors right down to every local community getting involved, whether that's selling tickets or purchasing tickets or giving them away to their customers."

St. Catharines city council voted unanimously to cover the $140,000 in rent and expenses at Meridian Centre. That leaves organizers still seeking $460,000 in local support, as requested by Curling Canada.

"It's huge, and most of that money doesn't come from local sponsorship," said Doug Geddie, a member of the bid committee. "It comes from provincial and federal grants.

"We've made applications for a Celebrate Ontario grant and a grant from Tourism Partnership Niagara, which is another provincial funding mechanism."

Plenty of work still needs to be done before the championships start Feb. 18, 2017.

"Now that we officially have it, we have to put together an organization to make it happen. So we're looking for between 400 and 500 volunteers just to pull it off," Geddie said.

Curling Canada will provide the bid committee with an organizational structure to implement. The committee's first step will be to find people to chair the 12 sub-committees.

Many of the volunteers will be back from when the city hosted the 2001 and 2007 Canadian curling juniors.

"A lot of them learned a new skill," Geddie said. "We ran a Curling Canada officiating clinic here, and a lot of people learned how to time and how to judge curling performance."

Tickets for the event will go on sale starting Feb. 20 at the Scotties event in Grand Prairie, Alta. Prices haven't yet been announced, but for the 2016 event they ranged from $15 to $20 for weekday draws, $369 for the entire week and $159 for a championship weekend mini-pack, which includes one ticket for each of the final six draws.

The attendance record for the tournament is 154,688, set in Regina in 1998. When Kingston hosted the event in 2013, it attracted 65,825 fans.

"We always like sellouts, and to us a sellout is a beautiful thing," Inch said. "In a 5,000-seat arena, it would be great if we could sell out every draw."

No city has ever sold out every draw.

"The final weekend will, of course, be sold out and the issue will be how we can do during the week," Geddie said.

"The only problem I can see is that curling is made for television. What we will be up against is whether people want to stay home and watch it or do they want to come out.

"But that's part of our challenge to come up with a product for that week that people think is worthwhile coming over to the arena and the HeartStop Lounge."

The HeartStop Lounge, which will be located at the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club, will feature the opening ceremonies, autograph sessions, band performances and other social activities. TSN will televise much of the event.

"It's a minimum of 66 hours on national television where St. Catharines is front and centre in the sports consciousness in Canada," Cameron said.

According to TSN, the 2015 Scotties drew an average viewership of 566,000, and 1.05 million for the final.

"The coverage we will see over the number of days of the Scotties Tournament of Hearts will be something that is really going to put St. Catharines on the map," Mayor Walter Sendzik said. "That's what we are trying to do here."

The impetus for hosting a Scotties came after the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club hosted the two national junior championships.

"The support from club members was fantastic, and the excitement in the building from being involved with something like that was pretty high," Geddie said.

After club members accepted an invitation from Curling Canada to attend the 2007 Scotties tournament in Sudbury, the interest ramped up to another level.

"It was impressive to see a national championship, but the facilities weren't impressive," Geddie said. "That was an eye-opener for us and we thought some day that we would like to do it in St. Catharines.

"The dream lingered from 2007 and once we knew there was a new arena in the works, we started thinking that maybe this was our chance. As soon as we had an arena to the point where we could show it off, we brought in Curling Canada to have a look and they loved it."

Two-time world curling champion Marilyn Bodogh was on hand Wednesday to help promote the event.

"It is my hope and dream that somewhere in the Meridian Centre sit two sisters next to each other Feb. 17, starting their dream to become the best — to be a Scotties champion, to win a world title, an Olympic gold medal. And to think, that it all started here in their hometown, St. Catharines," she said.

"Let the hard work begin."

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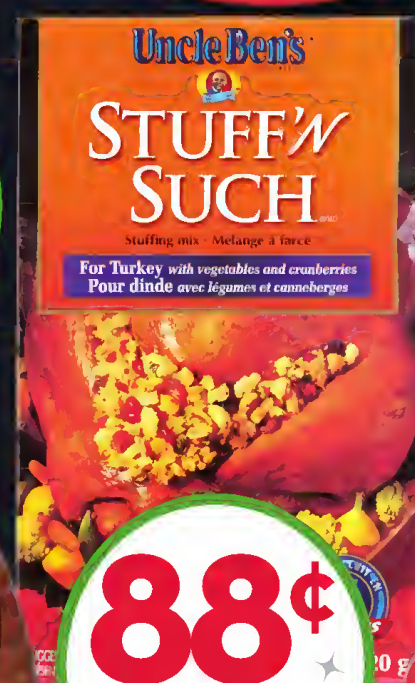

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- Call Telehealth 1-866-797-0000 for health advice and information from a registered nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Call 211 for information and services about healthcare in Niagara

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General healthcare options: www.niagarahealth.on.ca/Options

When to go to a Niagara Health System Emergency Department or Urgent Care Centre

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- Broken bones
- Dizziness
- Complications of pregnancy
- Serious illness
- Serious injury
- Mental health issues

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